

Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.



JUL 24 1941

U. S. Department of Agriculture

A radio talk by W. W. Vincent, chief, Western District, Food and Drug Administration, delivered Thursday, July 17 through Stations KGO, San Francisco, KECA, Los Angeles, and KHQ, Spokane, at 9:45 a.m. Pacific Standard Time.

My Friends, here is your Government representative again. For six weeks I have been relating some of my experiences and I have been telling you how to read food and drug labels. It is because of the effective enforcement of the Food and Drugs Act that I ask you "Read the Label" and avail yourselves of the advantages your Government has placed at your disposal. It is with reasonable certainty that you can depend upon the truthful labeling of your foods and drugs.

Please remember, I am offering to send all who write copies of my talks on "How to Read Food and Drug Labels". Will you not accept my invitation to become an intelligent label reader and therefore a discriminating buyer. This you can do by having your name placed upon our mailing list.

Today I shall tell how your Government safeguards your berry pies. The story deals with one packer but the conditions confronting him were common to all operating in the region. In the States of Oregon and Washington are packed immense quantities of blackberries, loganberries, raspberries and strawberries. The bulk of the blackberries go into large or No. 10 cans and are destined for commercial pies. The blackberries mature in late summer or in early fall. During this particular year there had been a number of heavy rains. Many of the berries reaching the canneries were soft, mushy and mouldy.

Very careful sorting with elimination of the objectionable material was the practice at most of the plants.

One firm, however, was not so particular. When your food and drug inspector first visited the plant they were canning objectionable berries; so objectionable, in fact, that when the crates were dumped, the berries - white with mold - would come out in a solid mass. The manager of the cannery was warned that such fruit could not be used for food purposes. The manager was rinsing the berries in water and thought that would remove the mold. The inspector cautioned him that thinking the mold was washed off wasn't sufficient; that the fruit must be clean and sound. The inspector made note of the can marks and departed. Returning a few days later he observed little improvement. Moldy and decomposed berries were still being canned.

Federal Food inspectors do not have authority to condemn foods until they move in interstate commerce, so the inspector, after warning them again, adopted a policy of watchful waiting; not until, however, he had visited the transportation companies and reported out to other food and drug inspection stations shipments aggregating something over 20,000 cases, all berries packed prior to his first visit, and which he had good reason to believe were of questionable quality. The State food authorities were informed of the shipper's attitude and of 4000 cases then in the canner's warehouse. These the State food authorities placed under embargo and ordered destroyed.

The Federal food inspector later called at the plant to see if all was well. It was not. About one half of the lot was missing. The manager accounted for the shortage by stating they had hauled it to the city dump and there destroyed it. Being a skeptic by nature, the inspector visited the city garbage collector. No berries had been dumped at the city garbage heap as was claimed. The garbage collector held the keys to the fenced enclosure and made a charge for the privilege of dumping. He was certain no berries had been destroyed. The inspector checked the transportation company's records - no berry shipments had been made. A truckman was found who had hauled several loads to Tacoma, Wash. He had delivered them to a steamship dock but they had disappeared by the time of the inspector's arrival. Here again a search of the steamship and railroad records failed to reveal disposition of the berries. It was a peculiar situation. No one around the dock knew anything about the berries, until a longshoreman took the inspector aside and indicated that a small freighter had called and loaded some of them aboard for shipment to Seattle.

The inspector also learned that a broker had now become involved, and was in part directing their disposition. After much searching the inspector got the entire distribution of the lot. They had been shipped together with other fruits and salmon to various parts of the country. Four different concerns located in three different cities had shipped this material. Sufficien it is to say that all shipments were followed up regardless of whether billed as berries, canned salmon or fruits. Seizures resulted in Salt Lake City, Ogden, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago and Baltimore.

Folks, you may believe me; some people do not always make it easy for a Federal food and drug inspector to find just what he is searching for.

Let's do some calculating. Let's put these berries into your pie. A carload generally contains 1000 cases, or 6000 of these large size tins. One can is sufficient for six pies of ten inch diameter. A wily baker using corn starch filler does even better. That makes 36,000 pies. When served to you in the restaurant they are cut in six pieces. Therefore 1000 cases yield a total of 216,000 portions of pie, which is some distribution from a carload of rotten berries.

My friends, I am able to tell you the packer of those berries discontinued the canning business. Others of his type have met with similar discouragement. It is very, very seldom your food and drug agents find a canner knowingly or unknowingly placing berries in his tins of a character which he himself would not be glad to consume. The ethical manufacturer of today stands squarely behind the food law enforcement officials in their handling of cases of a type I have just told you about.

Now, my friends, I want to tell you of the rise, decline and fall of the egg substitute game. A few years back when eggs were reaching luxury prices one keen-minded individual conceived the idea of an egg substitute, not to be consumed as a fresh egg, but to take the place of eggs wherever used in cooking. In other words, he would make an imitation dried egg powder. Immediately he got his product on the market, similar products to the extent of 100 or more sprang into existence, and were placed upon the retail grocery shelves of the country, on consignment, if necessary; were the retail grocer not disposed to pay for them before trial. They were called by various names: for example, "Eggsave", "Egginit", "Eggis", "Eggoline", "Really-Egg"; anything "Eggolet"

would do for a name as long as it sounded like "Egg", or contained the syllable "Eg". These mixtures generally consisted of corn starch, baking powder, milk casein, and a few had a small percentage of dried egg therein. Always they were artificially colored - yellow - to make them look like egg powder. The cost of the ingredients of these articles amounted to but a few cents a pound but they were sold at exorbitant prices. The majority were sold in small packages and a label which is typical reads: "Takes the place of expensive eggs in baking and cooking. This 4 ounce package contains sufficient 'Eggsave' to take the place of three dozen expensive fresh eggs. Guaranteed to comply with all Pure Food Laws". Frequently they placed the picture of an egg upon the carton in order to carry the deception further.

Consider for a moment. To make one pound of dried egg powder requires three dozen eggs of average size. These manufacturers excelled the hen that laid the Golden Egg. They gave you the equivalent of three dozen eggs in a four ounce package the contents of which consisted essentially of corn starch. Naturally, these products immediately ran counter not only to the Federal but to State Pure Food Laws as well. A short, serious, effective seizure campaign removed them from the market. The courts were sympathetic, as they always are, when asked to act in food fraud cases. Many, many lots of these fraudulent egg substitutes were condemned and destroyed and a number of the manufacturers were prosecuted and fined. The discouragement suffered by the manufacturers of these so-called egg substitutes was so great that the products disappeared entirely from the market.

You heard me quote from the "Eggsave" label: "Guaranteed to comply with all Pure Food Laws". Many people, I find, are still of the impression that all foods and drugs should bear a statement of that kind on the label, if the products are considered satisfactory by the Government. That belief is erroneous and such statements are now prohibited upon labels or packages of foods or drugs because it has been determined that a legend such as "Guaranteed under the Food and Drugs Act of June 30, 1906", is both misleading and deceptive. The public has been induced by such legends to believe that the articles to which they relate have been examined and approved by the Government and that the Government guarantees that they comply with the law.

Remember, now the goods have to comply with the law, and they should not bear such a legend. Such guarantees as are given, and they are given by all reputable manufacturers, are either incorporated in, or attached to, the bills of sale, invoice, or contracts under which sold. Your Food and Drug officials will see to it that they comply with the law.

A number of products are now appearing on the market under "certified brand" or as having been inspected, approved, or certified by a food institute, a food chemist, or by a doctor. Such certification does not mean Government approval for it has nothing to do with the Government. It must be taken for what it is worth. By a careful reading of the label, you can usually determine who is certifying the product which bears the word "certified".

The Food and Drug Administration tests artificial food colors and certifies those which are harmless to health. When manufacturers add these to food products the fact may be recorded on the label with the legend "certified color added".

There are two Bureaus of the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture that perform inspection work and certify food commodities. The Bureau of Animal Industry conducts a meat inspection service in those plants which ship their meats in interstate commerce and such meats are marked with the legend "Inspected and Passed by United States Department of Agriculture".

The Bureau of Agricultural Economics inspects dressed poultry and rabbits for certain firms availing themselves of the service. It involves an inspection when the animals are drawn. Distributors of the inspected products and manufacturers using them in canned food products are permitted to use the legend "Inspected and Certified by Bureau of Agricultural Economics U. S. Dept. of Agriculture."

I hope to tell you more of their activities at a later date.

Next Thursday at this hour I shall tell of people who claim to sell you Health - put up in packages, labeled "Health Foods". All of you should be interested in "Health Foods". Remember now, write to W. W. Vincent, U. S. Food & Drug Laboratory, San Francisco, California, if you desire our "Read the Label" information and would become a discriminating buyer. This week's issue of "Read the Label" facts tells you why you no longer see upon food and drug labels such statements as "Guaranteed under the Food and Drugs Act of June 30, 1906".

